

CENTRAL MINING COMPANY CLERK'S HOUSE  
Central Mine Historic District  
Main East-West road  
Central  
Keweenaw County  
Michigan

HABS MI-420  
*MI-420*

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY**  
**CENTRAL MINING COMPANY CLERK'S HOUSE**

**HABS No. MI-420**

Location: The structure faces north onto main east-west road in Central, about 1250 feet east of its intersection with principle north-south road in Central, Keweenaw County, Michigan.

Present Owner: The house is owned by Reuben Stetter. The Stetter family leases the land from Universal Oil Products, the successor to the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company.

Present Use: Reuben and Ruby Stetter and their son, Charles, inhabit the house during the summer months.

Significance: The Clerk's House is one of about twenty dwellings remaining in what was once a busy mining location. It is the best preserved and maintained house in Central, being furnished with turn-of-the-century pieces throughout. Historically, it was the house of the clerk of the mining company for at least twenty-five and perhaps as many as thirty or forty years.

Historian: Wendy Nicholas, July- August, 1975.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of Erection: Unknown. The house was standing with all three gabled sections in 1875, when John F. Robert moved in. However, before Robert, another company clerk, Saterlee, occupied the house. Exactly when the mining company built the house is not known.
2. Architect: The architect was probably an employee of the Central Mining Company or, possibly, of its predecessor, the Northwestern Mining Company.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: The house was built and owned by the mining company, who then leased the building to various tenants. A company clerk, George H. Saterlee, occupied the house until 1875 when John F. Robert took Saterlee's position and home. Robert and his family resided in the clerk's house until 1900 when Robert was promoted and they moved into the Agent's house. The clerk's house stood empty for over twenty years after Robert quit the premises. During the 1920s and 1930s, the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company, who had taken possession of Central in 1913, leased the house to the "Ideal Club." The club consisted of a group of Finnish and Italian hunters. In

1933 Mr. Schuller, the caretaker at Central, terminated the club's lease. Reuben Stetter took the house in 1934, and in 1960 bought the house from the Calumet and Hecla Mining Company for \$400. The chain of title tracing the ownership of the land on which the clerk's house was built follows.

United States to Waterman Palmer  
SE ¼ Section 23, Twp. 58N Range 31W  
June 26, 1851 Vol. A, p.71.

PATENT

Waterman Palmer to John Robingson  
undivided 2/3 of SE ¼ Section 23  
Twp. 58N Range 31W for \$5,333.33  
August 12, 1854 Book B, p. 185.

WARRANTY DEED

Waterman Palmer to Central Mining Company  
undivided 1/3 of SE ¼ of Twp. 58N  
Range 31W Section 23  
March 28, 1855 Book B, p. 277.

WARRANTY DEED

John Robingson et al to Central Mining Company  
undivided 2/3 of Section 23 SE ¼ for \$5,333.33  
June 9, 1855 Book B, p. 286.

WARRANTY DEED

Central Mining Company to Frontenac Copper Company  
September 7, 1905 Book O, p. 6.

WARRANTY DEED

Frontenac Copper Company to  
Calumet and Hecla Mining Company  
March 18, 1913 Book S, p. 79.

DEED

Universal Oil Products, successor of  
Calumet and Hecla, Inc.,  
to Calumet and Hecla Corporation  
July 31, 1968 Book 4, pp. 245-262.

QUIT CLAIM DEED

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, That CALUMET & HECLA, INC., a corporation organized under the laws of the State of Michigan, with offices of its Goodman Lumber Division at Calumet, Michigan, party of the first part, for and in consideration of the sum of Four Hundred and No/100<sup>ths</sup> Dollars (\$400. 00) to it paid by Reuben H. Stetter and Ruby Stetter, husband and wife, of 216 Pewabic Street, Laurium, Michigan, parties of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged, has bargained and sold and by these presents does grant and convey unto the said parties of the second part, their executors, administrators, or assigns, the following described personal property located in Houghton Township, Keweenaw County, Michigan, namely: the two (2) story, frame dwelling house, together with the outbuildings, structures, and fixtures appertaining thereto, now located on a parcel of land in the Northeast quarter of

the Southeast quarter (NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of SE  $\frac{1}{4}$ ) of Section Twenty-three (23) in T own ship Fifty-eight (58) North, Range Thirty-one (31) West, known and designated as Lot Five (5) Central Mine Location according to the system of numbering used by CALUMET & HECLA, INC. to designate its lots at its various locations, that being the parcel of land leased by first party to second parties by instrument of even date herewith.

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the same unto the said parties of the second part, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, FOREVER.

Parties of the second part take title to the above described property as personal property and subject to all the terms and conditions of the lease of even date herewith covering the real property on which said personal property is now located.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, CALUMET & HECLA, INC. has caused these presents to be signed in its name by G. A. Houghton, Jr., General Manager of its Goodman Lumber Division, duly authorized thereunto by a vote of the Board of Directors of said Company, and sealed with its corporate seal with like authority as of the 12<sup>th</sup> day of February 1960.

Attest:

CALUMET & HECLA, INC.

By \_\_\_\_\_

G. A. HOUGHTON, JR.

General Manager

4. Builder or Contractor, Suppliers: The house was probably built by employees of the Central Mining Company.

5. Original plans and construction: No plans or blueprints remain, and it is difficult to ascertain what the building was like originally. Examination of the structure suggests that the house, at first, was a two-story, two-bay square frame building. The northeast gabled section appears to have been a complete unit. In the basement, its structural support system is different from that in the rest of the house. Pairs of 2" x 8" boards rest on 3" x 4" posts notched to accomodate the sistered beams. Elsewhere, cinderblock piers reinforce the masonry load-bearing walls to support first floor structure. The floors in the northeast gabled section are also unlike those in the rest of the house. The boards are narrower than those in the other sections and they are laid along the east-west axis, whereas the others are laid along the north-south axis. The boards in the northeast section are uniformly well-worn, unlike other floors. The only entrance to the first floor from the outside, moreover, is through the northeast section. If this northeast section was built first, that is if it stood alone, it would have provided occupants with two rooms downstairs in addition to the entry hall and three bedrooms upstairs with a chimney through the center of the building.

Whether the kitchen would have been on the first floor with cook stove connected to the chimney is not clear. Conceivably there could have been a one-story single-room section attached to the west wall of the northeast gabled section originally or added later. During recent repairs to the siding, carpenters discovered evidence of a one-story gable line where the present two-story northwest gable is now. Also before the present paint

job, a distinct division between the northwest and southwest sections was visible. These clues indicate that at one time a single room extended from the west wall of the main section of the house at its southwest corner. Whether this was original, perhaps serving as the kitchen or whether it was a later addition can not be ascertained. No basement was ever excavated beneath this section.

6. Alterations and additions: As has been indicated, the dates for the original construction and later gable additions are not known. By 1876, however, the clerk's house had acquired all three gabled sections. Evidence shows that the roof of the northwest section was raised to accommodate a second story. The southwest addition was probably constructed after the changes were made to the northwest section, for a distinct line between the two is visible in photographs taken before the house was painted, in 1968 or around that time. The outhouse was then connected to the back of the southwest section.

The southeast shed addition is very recent. A run-down back porch was once attached to the back of the house, but was removed in the 1930s. An enclosed sitting room and modern bathroom were built south of the main section of the house where the porch had been in ca. 1963. The windows in the south wall of the northeast section were left when the southeast addition was built. The door from the kitchen to the back porch (closest to the parlor) now opens into the sitting room. What was once a window in the east wall of the kitchen is now another doorway to the sitting room.

At sometime prior to 1875 the open veranda was added to the front of the house. It was probably not original. A 1935 photograph of the house shows that a balustrade was erected along the edge of the veranda between the pillars. The present owners removed it when they rejuvenated the porch in ca. 1946. The action restored the rhythm or flow achieved by the unobstructed line of pillars with their decorative impost blocks.

During their tenancy, the Ideal Club members reroofed the building with black composition roofing. They painted the words "IDEAL CLUB" on top of it in white letters. The Stettens covered over the black paper with green composition roofing in ca. 1938. They also attached the scalloped bargeboard from the Agent's House to the eaves of the Clerk's House. A metal weather deflector was placed atop each chimney.

Inside, the house has undergone few changes with exception of the additions. Cinderblock piers were erected against masonry walls in the cellar to strengthen them. On the first floor, there has been some subtraction of walls in the kitchen. Before 1935 an east-west partition divided the kitchen along the same line as the south end of the pantry. The pantry door opened into the northern half of the kitchen rather than into the dining room as it does now. A similarly situated partition existed on the second floor in the library. Then, the two rooms created were the maids' quarters. Both partitions had disappeared before 1935 when the Stettens moved in.

B. Historical events and persons associated with the building

From the time of its completion until 1900, the building served as the Central Mining Company clerk's home. It is believed that only two company officials lived in the house: George H. Saterlee, company clerk until 1875, and John F. Robert, clerk until 1900. Little is known about Saterlee, but Robert is less evasive.

John Robert was from a wealthy French Huguenot family of New York City. He was a banker in New York before he moved west. His brother, Phillip, was working at the Delaware mine on the Keweenaw Peninsula while John was living in New York. John's parents urged him to join his brother in Michigan. John had a drinking problem and his parents' hoped to remove him from the temptations surrounding him in the New York metropolis by sending him to the far reaches of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Little did they know how fervently Copper Country miners worshipped Drink. John was persuaded and went to join his brother in the 1870s. In the Central Mining Company report of 1875 it was announced that John F. Robert had replaced Saterlee as the company clerk. He apparently retained the position for twenty-five years until 1900 when he was promoted to Agent. By that time, however, the Central Mining Company had ceased nearly all operations at the mine, and John was charged with wrapping up loose ends.

The clerk held an important post in the mine management. He was charged with bookkeeping and payroll. The clerk was responsible to the Agent, who was first in command at the mine. The Robert family kept maids, and, although polite, they were considered aloof.

The Central Mining Company Clerk's House presents problems in research. The house was built at sometime by one of two mining companies, either the Northwestern or the Central Mining Company. The identity of the first occupants of the house is not clear.

The date of erection is not known, neither is the extent of the original structure. The Northwestern Mining Company minded the land for a short time at the beginning of the 1850s. In 1855, the land was sold to the Central Mining Company, a New York-based corporation. At that time the Central Mining Company took over both the mines and the Northwestern Company's buildings. It also built new structures as operations expanded. Whether the house under study was among the buildings purchased from Northwestern or whether it was built by Central Mining Company is not known. Mining Company reports contain general announcements of construction plans but none single out specific houses. The house was leased to employees by the mining company. Thus no deeds identifying occupants were recorded.

What we do know is that John F. Robert moved into the house in 1875 when he became clerk for the Central Mining Company. He scratched his initials and the date into a window pane in the house. And in 1876 Robert and his family had, their picture taken on the porch of the house. In that year, the Central Mining Company's annual report announced that George Saterlee the clerk was retiring and was replaced by John F. Robert. We might speculate, then, that clerk Saterlee occupied the house before Robert for it was often the custom of the mining companies to assign specific residences to specific professionals. But, we can not be certain. Furthermore, there is no identification of an occupant of the house of clerk of the company before Saterlee.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

#### A.General Statement

1. Architectural character: The Central Mining Company Clerk's House is one of approximately twenty remaining dwellings at the Central Mine location. A much added-to frame house, it is the house to which the mining company clerk was assigned. Lacking any distinctive architectural detail, it remains a well-preserved structure of simple design (fig. 1).
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

#### B.Description of exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story building stands over a footprint measuring approximately 35' x 64'; it is visually divided into two bays along its front facade. There are, also, single story shed additions which make for irregular massing in the building's overall appearance. The walls intersect at right angles with over-all effect of two rectangular triangles overlapping at corners.
2. Foundations: Stone masonry load-bearing walls.
3. Walls: The outside walls are covered with green-gold painted clapboard siding with contrasting white watertable, corner posts, and cornice board. The basement of the southeast shed is at grade level and is covered with board and batten.
4. Structural system, framing: There are load-bearing masonry walls with supportive post and beam systems beneath the northeast gabled section of the house. The walls have been strengthened with cinderblock piers in several locations. A single cinderblock pier has been placed in the center of the cellar of the northeast section to provide reinforcement for the floor.
5. Porches, stoops, towers: A one-story, six-foot wide veranda extends along the north facade of the house. Its bell cast roof is covered with composition roofing kept in place with 1" x 2" boards. It is supported by ten wood posts spanned by elliptical arches with decorative impost blocks. The five steps to the porch are located opposite the front (north) entrance. There is a balustrade on either side of the steps which ends in octagonal newel posts, tapering in at the top. There are "U" shaped gutters around the porch.
6. Chimneys: Three interior chimneys served the stoves inside the house. One is located in the center of the northeastern-most gable, another on the northwestern gable near its intersection with the northeast gable, and the third near the south end of the southwest gable. The chimneys are brick with corbeled caps within, and extending above are stove flues and caps.
7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The front (north) entrance is in the west bay of the northeast gabled section. The door is a single panel wood door and there is a screen door. The sill, frames and lintel are simple wooden boards. There is a three-paned overlight above the door. A drip cap is above the lintel. A board and batten basement door is located on the east facade in foundation wall of the back addition.

b. Windows and shutters: Simple frame, nine-over-nine and nine-over-six, double sash windows and six-over-six four-sash mullioned windows light the first and second floors. One nine-paned fixed window illuminates the basement. Sills, frames and lintels are flat boards with flat drip caps above. There are louvered wood shutters for all first and second floor windows on the northeast and northwest sections. None on the southwest section or southeast addition.

#### 8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The house is covered with three intersecting gables with shed roofs over back (south) additions. Rolled composition roofing covers all roof surfaces.

b. Cornice, eaves: The eaves are boxed with a flat white cornice board below. A decorative bargeboard of elongated scallops trims the roof line. There is no cornice on the southwest shed addition.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: The square wood ventilator stack for the outhouse shed on the south wall remains.

### C. Description of interior

1. Floor plans: The front door opens into a narrow stairhall with a single flight stair along the west wall of the northeast gable section. Two parlors lie to the east and south of the entrance hall. The dining room, kitchen, pantry, back stair and outhouse line the west wall of the building, encompassing the western half of the dwelling. A recent sunroom, modern bathroom, and stairway to the cellar occupy the additions to the back of the northeast gabled section. The second floor can be reached from either the front or back staircase. In the northeast gabled section are three small bedrooms to off a central hall. One steps down into the master bedroom which is above the dining room in the northwest gabled section of the house. To the south of the master bedroom is a large open library. The back stairs connect the library with the kitchen below it. The basement is excavated except underneath the dining room and outhouse. Masonry walls divide the space much as it is divided on the first floor, reflecting the stages of construction (figs. 2-4).

2. Stairways: There are three stairways in the house. The principle one, which provides access to the second floor bedrooms from the front entry hall, is a single straight flight, open-string stair. Its single balustrade is quite simple. Square 1" x 1" balusters support an elliptical rail, one per tread. The tapered newel post has chamfered corners. At the back of the house, connecting the kitchen to the second floor library is a steep, enclosed back stair with treads opening 7 ½" x 24". On the second floor level, the stair opening can be



closed off by a horizontal door. Also, the stair is enclosed by painted, paneled wood. It balances a cupboard on the other end of the wall. A third stairway leads to the basement. It is a single flight, open string case with no rail and is entered from a room south of the kitchen, adjacent to the outhouse.

3. Flooring: The basement floors are concrete. First and second floors are of pine planks of various widths. Those in the northeast gabled section of the house have been painted and are more heavily worn than the stained boards elsewhere in the house. There are raised sills in the doorways between the rooms and one step up from the second floor hall into the master bedroom and two steps down from the master bedroom into the library.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings are plaster, either painted or papered. There is a simple wood baseboard throughout. There is a chair rail in the dining room and kitchen. Cellar walls of the northeast gabled section have been plastered and painted white. The kitchen ceiling is lower than average.

#### 5. Openings

a. Doorways and doors: The northeast gabled section of the house has single panel wood doors painted white on both floors. Four and five panel doors are found elsewhere in the house. Slightly molded lintels and frames trim the doors. An approximately eight-foot wide rectangular opening separates the two parlors in the northeast section of the house.

6. Decorative features and trim: Several rooms have built-in cabinets or free-standing units.

7. Hardware: There is an Eastlake bronze doorknocker elaborately incised with geometric and floral designs. A bird is incised on the handle of the knocker. In the parlors, dining room, kitchen, and library hang cast iron kerosene lamps.

8. Mechanical equipment: Three cast iron heating stoves and one cook stove are in the house. The kitchen and sitting room are now heated by a steam furnace. Radiators are from the Agent's House. The Clerk's House is lit primarily by kerosene lamps and chandeliers. A few electric lights have been installed, however, in the sitting room and hallways.

#### D. Site

The house faces north up a moderately steep slope of grass, periwinkle, and thimbleberry bushes. A very few trees are planted in the yard. To the west of the Clerk's House are the remains of the mining company's Engine House built of poor rock.

1. Historic landscape design: The Central Mining Company Clerk's House was built at the eastern end of the location in the section of Central known as Northwestern named for the Northwestern Mine, which had operated before the Central Mining Company bought it out. Across the street from the Clerk's House was the Agent's House. Dwellings of other similarly prestigious members of the community also occupied sites at

Northwestern. The company barn housing the horses stood several hundred yards south of the Clerk's House. Historically, little landscaping was done around the Central buildings. Bird's-eye views of the location show houses and mine buildings dotting a virtually barren slope. The Clerk's House had two small trees planted in front of the veranda and a white picket fence surrounded the yard.

2. Outbuildings: None.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

#### A. Primary & unpublished:

Deeds are in the Keweenaw County Courthouse in Eagle River, MI.

Interview with Charles Stetter, 216 Pewabic St., Laurium 22 July 1975, 3 August 1975. Stetter has spent many years studying the buildings at Central, particularly the clerk's house. He has interviewed relatives of John Robert and has collected records of the mining companys at Central. In his collection are the following exterior views of the Clerk's House:

- a. Exterior View showing north and west facades 1876
- b. Exterior view showing north and west facades 193fi
- c. Exterior View showing north and west facades 1946 ca.
- d. Exterior View showing north and west facades ca. 1956

Stetter also has a bird's eye view (photo) of the Northwestern section of Central, ca. 1890.

#### B. Likely sources not yet investigated:

Central Mining Company annual reports in possession of Mr. Stetter.

Sanborn's Insurance Atlas. Central Mine. 1898.

### PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation was done in the summer of 1975 by Kevin Harrington and Wendy Nicholas for the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service.

Fig. 1 Perspective view. Photo by author, 1975.

Fig. 1 Perspective view. Photo by author, 1975.



Fig. 2 Floor plan of basement. Drawing by author, 1975.

CENTRAL MINING COMPANY CLERK'S HOUSE  
BASEMENT PLAN

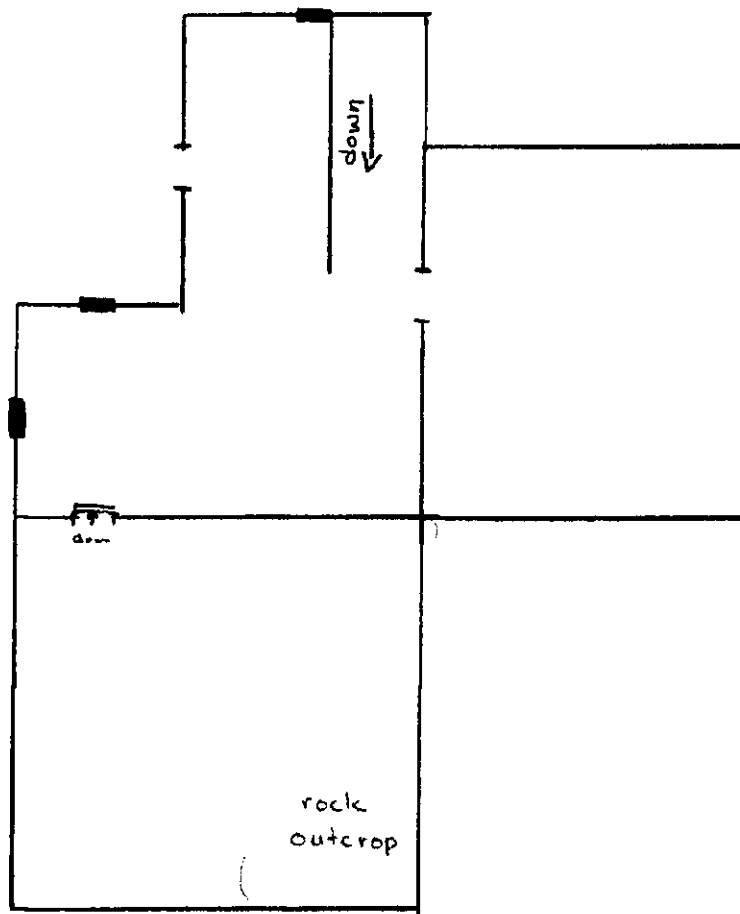


Fig. 3 Floor plan of first floor. Drawing by author, 1975.

CENTRAL MINING COMPANY CLERK'S HOUSE  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

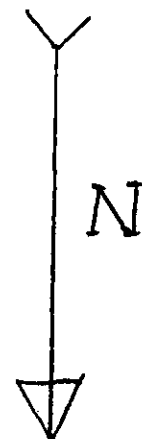
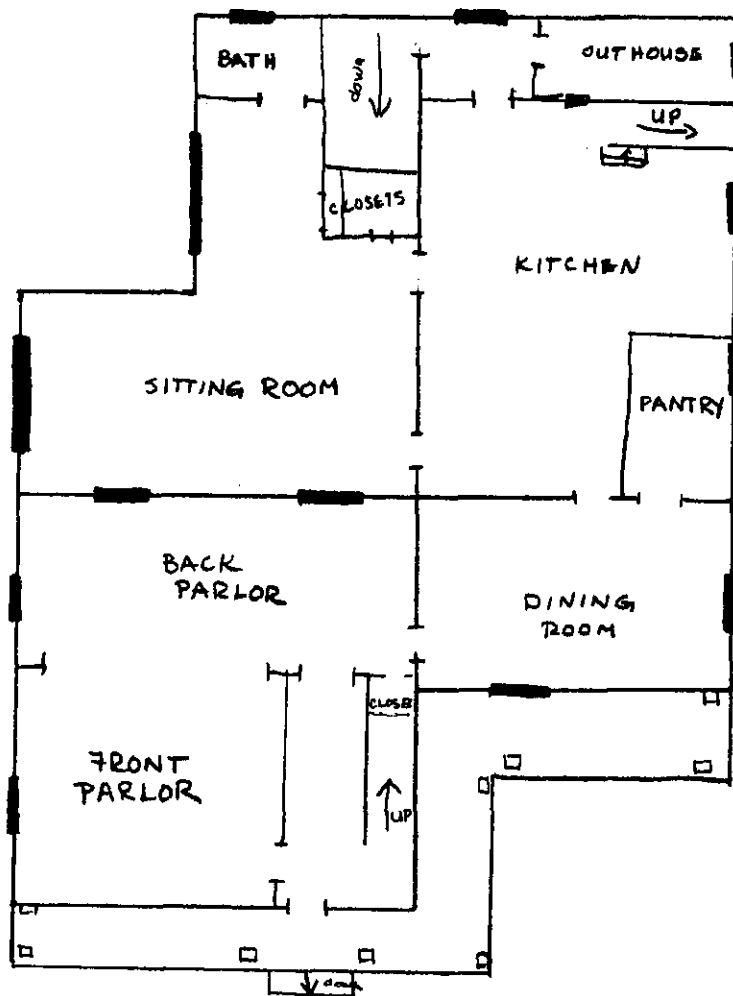


Fig. 4 Floor plan of second floor. Drawing by author, 1975.

CENTRAL MINING COMPANY CLERK'S HOUSE  
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

